Jesus’ Teaching on Marriage

Matthew 19:1-15

Key Verse: 19:6,14 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 14Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

The issues of marriage, family, and divorce have been concerns for all generations. Recently a county clerk in a small town of Kentucky refused to issue a marriage license to a same-sex couple, and it drew a national attention. People worry about the depravity, lack of family values and its costly consequences. In today’s passage the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce and Jesus responded to them with his teaching on marriage. Let us study what Jesus taught them about marriage, divorce, and children so that we may have godly and Biblical views of marriage, family, and children.

First, the certificate of divorce (1-3) Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. On the way to Jerusalem Jesus welcomed all the sick and healed them all. Jesus knew that he was going to die on the cross for the sins of the world. But he did not mind this, as he demonstrated the Messiah’s mercy and compassion for those who were suffering. At that same time Satan’s opposition to Jesus became more intense. The Pharisees were religious leaders who taught the Scriptures in their synagogues. They came to Jesus to test him with the issue of divorce. Look at verse 3. “***Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”*** The Pharisees tested Jesus in order to damage Jesus’ reputation with the charge of his violation of Moses’ Law. Moses’ Law about divorce is written in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which says, “*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,****2****and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man,****3****and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies,****4****then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.*” The Pharisees asked Jesus with “for any and every reason.” At that time among the Pharisees there were different opinions between two schools because of different interpretations of the words, “something indecent.” A school named “Shammai” interpreted ‘something indecent’ as not necessarily sexual immorality or marital unfaithfulness, but a serious offense to their relationship. On the other hand a school named “Hillel” interpreted the words ‘something indecent’ widely, such as poor cooking or annoying behavior. In this male-dominant society women were victimized by their harsh and senseless husbands. For the sake of the weakness of the position of women and for giving them another chance for a better life Moses permitted a certificate of divorce. The motivation of Moses’ permission for divorce was based on God’s mercy and compassion. But the motivation of the Pharisees’ question was devious. The Pharisees wanted to put Jesus in a trap through this controversial issue so that they might destroy Jesus and his ministry.

How did Jesus answer them? Jesus didn’t answer in terms of sad divorce but in terms of happy marriage. Satan always discourages people with sad news and gloomy stories. Jesus always encourages people with good news and happy stories. Look at verses 4-6. “***Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”***  In his answer Jesus teaches us a few very important things about marriage and family. First of all, marriage is created by God. Look at verse 4 again. According to Genesis 2 Adam did not initiate marriage. He did not seek for a woman to marry or nag God for a wife. When God saw Adam being alone, God felt that it was not good for him to be alone. God made a woman out of one of his ribs to become his suitable helper. God brought the woman to the man. This is the first date between a man and a woman in human history. Therefore the first marriage was created by God, made for God and established in God. God is the Creator and the author of marriage. Marriage is holy and sacred because it was originated and validated by God from the beginning. This is why a couple makes a marriage vow before a priest, a pastor, or a publically ordained person.

Second of all, marriage is a total union between a male and a female. These days same sex marriage is a sensitive and controversial issue in the world. But whatever men may say, the Bible says clearly that a marriage is established between a male and a female. Not only Biblically but also biologically a male and anther male cannot become one flesh. They cannot produce children. Marriage is not only for sex, which is also created by God for a happy and intimate union, but also for reproduction, which means child birth of the next generation. (Malachi 5:15)

What does it mean ‘to become one flesh’? It means ‘a total union’ of not only physical, but also mental and spiritual. When a man and a woman grow up, they leave their parents and become independent. After they marry, they become united. Being united indicates mutual commitment. It is a covenant. So in their marriage vow they promise to be faithful to each other, take care of each other, and live together until death does them part. Marriage is formed between two imperfect persons and is processed for a perfect union. Between a husband and a wife, having different character and different interests is not strange but natural. There should not be any reason or excuse for divorce. A husband’s weak points and shortcomings are prayer topics for his wife, and his strong points and merits are her thankful topics, and the same the other way around. In any and every situation they should work together for a better relationship and a perfect union. No one can be married as a perfect man and a perfect woman in a perfect condition. While they are living, they work together for a better condition and a better relationship through their patience, compassion, understanding, and forbearance.

Third of all, marriage is sacred. Let us read verse 6 again. “*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* A Catholic priest said, “Marriage is not a joke.” I believe that he meant that a marriage should be sincere and be respected. This is because marriage is created and officiated by God. What God has joined together, let no one separate. A man and a woman may meet, date, and separate before they marry if they don’t like each other. But after they are married, after they take a marriage vow, they are no longer two, but one. They are one flesh. They are responsible for each other. They share everything together until death does them part. Differences of character, physical weaknesses, economical disability, and any human weakness cannot come before their marriage vow before the Holy God. They should not find a reason or an excuse for divorce. What God has joined together, let no one separate. God is the author and creator of marriage. God is the head of the family.

The Pharisees should have listened to Jesus’ teaching on a marriage and repented of their stubborn hearts. But they kept challenging Jesus with the matter of divorce. Look at verse 7. ***“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”***  What was Jesus’ answer? Look at verses 8,9. “***Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”*** Jesus wanted to protect the family. In Malachi 2:16 God says, “I hate divorce!” God also wanted to protect women from evil men. God wants to protect the family because he is the creator of marriage and the head of the family. May God restore the biblical and godly view of marriage in America. May God establish many godly families who produce godly children who fear God and worship Him. Amen.

What was the disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ teaching on a marriage? Their view of marriage was negative and somewhat burdensome. Look at verse 10. ***“The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”*** The disciples meant that if marriage requires such duty and responsibility, it is better for a man to remain as single. They meant that it was very difficult for them to keep all the responsibilities and duties and to have a perfect unity in a family. “***Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”*** (11-12) The Apostle Paul didn’t marry. He lived as single in order to give his whole life to God. Sarah Barry followed the Apostle Paul. Like Paul and Sarah, those who are determined to devote their lives for Christ and for the gospel may remain as single. But this is up to God’s calling and his sovereignty. Only those who understand Jesus’ teaching can accept his message.

Second, bless your children (13-15) Then some people brought their little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. The people must have been moved by Jesus’ teaching about marriage and family and realized the importance of God’s blessing on their family and their children. Those who brought their children to Jesus for blessing are truly good parents. True blessing comes from the Lord. God is the source of all blessings. This was why Jacob struggled with an angel all night until his hip was thrown out of its socked in order to receive God’s blessing. If you want to see your children grow under God’s blessing, bring them to Christ Jesus and pray for them. Lay your hands on them and bless them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Stop cursing them, but bless them!

What was the disciple’s response to the parents and their children? The disciples rebuked them. The disciples thought that the parents were obnoxious and their children were noisy. The disciples forgot Jesus’ teaching that they should become like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:3). Let’s see how Jesus helped his disciples. Look at verse 14. “***Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”*** Jesus loves children and loves for them to come to him. This is because he is gentle and humble. He blessed children because they are the growing hope for the future. Jesus blessed them, hoping that they might establish beautiful and godly house churches like Ben & Rebekah West’s family and Michael & Hope’s family. Children are simple and honest. After they fight, they forget and easily get along with each other. Between a husband and a wife there should be trust, love, honesty, faithfulness, and mindfulness. When a family is restored, society will be strong. When marriage is done in God, by God, and for God, there will be no more broken families in this country. May God bless America and all families! Let us read verses 4,15.